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World Chronicle

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UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL DRUG CONTROL PROGRAMME

Giorgio GIACOMELLI, Executive Director of the Vienna-based United Nations International Drug Control Programme, discusses current issues in the field of illicit drug use and trafficking. Among these are the opening up of trade world-wide, which has also made it easier for drug smugglers and money launderers. Mr. Giacomelli describes how countries which previously had few drug problems -- such as China and Pakistan -- now face growing numbers of addicts. He also says that experiments around the world with decriminalization of drugs have not reduced addiction. Sweden, in fact, has tightened up its approach after a period of liberalization. He calls for a major involvement by international financial institutions to take drug issues into account when supporting national development programmes.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

It's a plague that affects just about every country on earth, and it's getting worse. It's drug abuse and illicit trafficking, a multi-billion dollar criminal activity which in recent years has become a truly global problem. From money laundering to terrorism, from the streets of big cities to rural communities, the power and political influence of drug cartels are on the rise.

Our guest on World Chronicle is the senior United Nations official in the fight to reduce both the demand for and the availability of illegal drugs. He is Giorgio Giacomelli, the Executive Director of the Vienna-based United Nations International Drug Control Programme.

Mr. Giacomelli will be interviewed by Ian Steele of the Press Foundation of Asia and Linda Fasulo of NBC News. Mr. Giacomelli, welcome to World Chronicle.

GIACOMELLI: Thank you.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Executive Director, there's a recurring debate on the pros and cons of decriminalization of drugs, particularly the soft drugs, marijuana. What are the views of your organization on that?

GIACOMELLI: Well, first of all, I'll say that it has to be put clear that governments, up to now, have all been in agreement that this is not an issue, for the time being. There is a consensus in the General Assembly, on the Commission,[1] that legalization or decriminalization -- there are so many terms, often used improperly -- it's not at all to be considered. But you're quite right, outside there, in the civil society, there is a debate. It is a debate which is inevitable and probably healthy in any democratic society, as such an intractable problem would be debated.

The Programme has a daunting task, to be both the custodian of the conventions and, on the other hand, to be a centre of analysis and research. In the first function, of course, we are paid for being those that watch that conventions are ratified by everybody if possible -- they have been by the large majority of countries -- and implemented. And if people are not happy with them, they should and could be changed.

LITTLEJOHNS: What are these conventions you speak of?

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[1] The Commission on Narcotic Drugs, a subsidary body of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

GIACOMELLI: The three main conventions, 1961,[2] 1971[3] and 1988,[4] respectively, on the classic drugs; the natural drugs, the psychotropic substances; and '88, on the traffic of drugs.

LITTLEJOHNS: But your Programme was only set up in 1990.

GIACOMELLI: Yes, a little more than three years ago. But before, of course -- the Programme was born through the merger of the units of the United Nations that had been dealing with drugs since the League of Nations, in fact.

LITTLEJOHNS: So you avoided replication essentially. Was that the reason for setting up your Programme?

GIACOMELLI: That was a reason, but the main reason was the growing perception and understanding of what you just said, that this is a global issue that cannot be tackled or handled piecemeal, it has to be attacked from all sides at the same time. The debate, as I said, is due in part to a difference of opinion, which is quite legitimate, but largely -- and this is what should worry us -- to a certain discouragement and defeatism. People are afraid, are fed up; they don't see sufficient progress. So they say crime is rampant, money laundering, and --

LITTLEJOHNS: So don't make it a crime any more.

GIACOMELLI: That's right.

STEELE: What are some of the most worrying trends at the present time? We see an increase in the availability of drugs, the purity of drugs; we see lower prices; we see an increase in usage among young people, among older people, among women. What are the -- these are the broad sociological problems; what are their core problems that you're trying to deal with?

GIACOMELLI: Well, first of all I think that, while the problem is getting worse, this is largely due to the fact that we know more. Many of the problems that were there were either swept under the carpet by a number of countries that didn't like to recognize that they had a problem, or maybe they were just not known. Now they are better known. So in a way, paradoxically, things have to grow worse in order to get better. In some countries, in fact, young people are less prone to become drug addicts. The real problem we have to live with is the hard core drug addicts all over the world for whom

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[2] Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (New York, 30 March 1961).

[3] Convention on Psychotropic Substances (Vienna, 21 February 1971).

[4] United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Vienna, 20 December 1988).

we have to do more. Something can be done, but the results are modest. We know that when a certain stage is reached, we have to handle this problem as best we can.

The hardest issues with which we try to deal are both thematic and geographic. Thematically, drugs are becoming more available, because with the efforts to liberalize -- which I hope will continue -- trade, movement of people, money, information, and therefore fashions, all societies have access to drugs. This, on the other hand, creates a market, makes a market easy to penetrate, and encourages the cartels and the smaller organizations -- because we always think of cartels, but that's not the whole story. We have the cartels in some countries -- mafias, Barrio Cordón, et cetera -- but then you have a number of small organizations which are as, and maybe even more, dangerous because they're more violent. So they immediately take advantage of situations such as the one we have in Africa, where the relative fragility of institutions has created a privileged route for transit and traffic, or, more recently, what happened in the ex-Soviet Union, creating a huge new market and a huge channel for transit and traffic.

STEELE: To what extent have you been able to track the influence of drugs and drug money to the conflicts in the world today, the financing of arms purchases, armies?

GIACOMELLI: Well, you see, while it would be very nice to talk about how much we've done and the success we have achieved in tracking, I think our success has been to focus better, to make everybody understand that this is a common problem and to begin to build the foundation of a common approach. A lot is done in the area, for instance, of legislation. We provide blueprints, we help to draft, we give advice for legislation that should not only be consistent with the conventions but should be compatible, so that cooperation becomes easier. It is obvious that across the borders there must be intelligence, information and mutual support.

Now we are putting a lot of effort and emphasis first on coordinating and mobilizing all the agencies that may be interested -- which is practically all of them, of the system, outside of the system -- and above all, the regional organizations. And second, in addition, what we do within the individual countries is to help them put together a master plan, again, compatible with the others and consistent with the conventions and with the specific problems of a given country as well as the global problems which are shared by everybody. But to establish a link between these two aspects and to succeed in one day I hope a global effort and control -- because we have to speak of control, not of winning any war -- is like achieving health for everybody, or achieving the end of crime. This is a problem that has profound roots in humankind, and not only must we contain it in physiologically manageable dimensions, we must encourage regional cooperation. And we have started a number of such cooperations, in

southeast Asia, southwest Asia, south of the continent, in Latin America, and in Europe, eastern Europe.

FASULO: Mr. Giacomelli, just returning a little bit to decriminalizing, or legalizing drugs, you say there's a consensus against it now, but I know there have been several experiments, I guess, in a few countries. Why is it now that there is a consensus? Is it that the availability just increases, and drug use increases? Or -- I mean, are you basically saying that, you know, decriminalizing is not something for governments to even think about?

GIACOMELLI: No, no, I don't say that. We are here as a tool for the international community, therefore governments, to deal as best they think and feel in a given moment. And we have to provide the best of our knowledge or the elements of judgement. What we can say is that, number one, whatever the debate is, it should be conducted with extreme rigour, because up to now, we don't have evidence of any certainty or even probability that such an approach would diminish or eliminate the drug problem. There have been very serious studies conducted by a number of corporations or foundations, by ourselves, and we must say that, if anything, we have evidence that whenever the guard was lowered and there was not sufficient attention devoted to the control, the problems have been there. Think of China in the last century, but more recently what happened in Sweden, which in the early sixties was the leading country in trying out a legalization approach; they backtracked very fast and are now the staunchest defenders of a firm stand. Pakistan, even more recently: Pakistan thought they would never have a problem with drugs. They had a problem of production, not of consumption. Well, in less than 10 years, as is publicly recognized by the government of Pakistan, they have 3 million addicts, of which 1.5 million are heroin addicts. If you look at what's happening now in the third world, in countries that usually didn't think they had a problem -- China, Burma, India, Pakistan I mentioned, a number of South American countries and many others -- they do have a very serious problem.

Establishing control can be more or less difficult and can be based on different philosophies. For instance, you know the debate, very well known, that exists between European countries that, at the level at least of the civil society, have a propensity for one solution or another. When looked at from, let's say, the hills of the Golden Triangle or the Andes in Latin America, they are a tempest in a teapot, where they are countries so very similar in size usually, in structure, with an extraordinary social organization, and they have more or less the same results tackling the problem from very different points of view. So this is a debate which, as I say, appears to be interesting, important, but has not as yet given any argument for a change of course.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is World Chronicle. Our guest is Giorgio Giacomelli, Executive Director of the UN International Drug Control Programme.

Mr. Giacomelli, perhaps the punishment doesn't fit the crime. I mean, okay, in Singapore people have been sentenced to death, or at least one person was sentenced to death and executed as a drug trafficker. But in most countries probably these chaps are getting away with it, aren't they?

GIACOMELLI: Well, indeed, many more people have been executed. That was a person from the west. But many local people had already been --

LITTLEJOHNS: Is that so?

GIACOMELLI: -- in very many countries.

LITTLEJOHNS: I see.

GIACOMELLI: Well, you know, it's a very delicate matter to intervene in what is such an internal, sensitive problem.

LITTLEJOHNS: But your Programme provides guidelines.

GIACOMELLI: We provide guidance for the approach that there should be. The nature of punishment, whatever may be the point of view of the Programme, or my individual point of view, is something which belongs very much to the juridical culture of a given country. The problem, I believe, more than being related to the severity of the punishment, is the clear-cut message that comes from the law. A thing is admitted or not. Then the approach, under the umbrella of the conventions, to take care of those that violate the law can be different. There are countries that favour a re-education, an administrative handling of it; others that are much more severe. It depends, as I said, on the culture of each and every country.

STEELE: Mr. Giacomelli, you mentioned the liberalization of capital markets and trade. Surely that's opening a whole new set of problems for you, particularly with privatization in eastern Europe. Is there any evidence that drug money -- and I understand by some reckonings there's $85 billion floating out there looking for a safe, legitimate home -- is there any evidence that any of this money is finding its way into the privatization process, into strategic areas? And are governments sensitive to where the money's coming from, in their rush to sell off power companies, telephone companies, et cetera?

GIACOMELLI: Yes, indeed, there is evidence. It is recognized almost daily by the governments of these countries in transition. The problem is related to the number of new financial institutions being created, the new stock markets, real estate and investment, and to the lack of institutions and of an up-to-date legislation that provides for control. But there is very much awareness. We are working very closely with all the

new countries, the Baltic countries, central Asian countries, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and we are assisting them both in putting together model legislation and coordinating the efforts undertaken by everybody, including bilateral programmes, upon the request of the Dublin Group, which is an informal group of --

LITTLEJOHNS: Of what group? Dublin?

GIACOMELLI: The Dublin Group. It's a group of policy-makers, to which belong, let's say, the western countries, to make it simple. And they ask UNDCP to be the traffic light, in a way, to have a computerized programme where all the needs and what is done by each and everyone is there so that duplications are avoided. The system is working. I was in Kiev only a few days ago, and it is clear that the authorities in those countries are extremely keen to be assisted, not only with money, although they need that, but also with advice, support and good counsel.

FASULO: Mr. Giacomelli, the international community, as we know, is very diverse. There are countries who are wholeheartedly fighting, you know, drug abuse; there are other countries that more or less turn a blind eye to the production, because very often it means income to that very nation. What -- I mean, how serious is the problem, first of all, of countries that really are not living up to international agreements, and what more can be done to force them to comply?

GIACOMELLI: Yes. Here there are two aspects to be considered. One is very often lack of real understanding of the economic impact of drug abuse and traffic. Some countries that may be in need of resources, of hard currency, may be tempted; in fact, they may be in a quandary in front of this money that comes in. And what we are doing is to provide them with evidence of how dangerous this is. Because there are cases in which, little by little, the legal side of the economy is literally bought out by the cartels. I don't want to drop any names, but this is what happens.

FASULO: But how many cases would you -- how large a problem is this, really? How many countries?

GIACOMELLI: Oh, quite large.

FASULO: What, ten?

GIACOMELLI: Quite large. I think it is more in the range of twenties or thirties than tens, but now I would have to go through my fingers.

LITTLEJOHNS: Of countries which are violating the conventions?

GIACOMELLI: No, no, no, no. I mean countries that are exposed to having drug money coming in as a tempting contribution to the economy, and vice versa, polluting and corrupting the legal economy and buying out land, real estate and business. The other aspect which is also to be considered is that money laundering is a

tremendous element of corruption. So sometimes the attitudes adopted by some governments -- governments are made by men and can be also influenced by the degree of corruption that can infiltrate agencies, such as police and customs, or even administrations of different kinds. So these two aspects have to be taken care of. There is an increasing sensitivity to the problem. A number of events have been taking place recently and will take place. Not long ago in Courmayeur there was a meeting dealing with money laundering that examined all these aspects -- that was in preparation of the ministerial meeting of the United Nations that will take place in Naples next month. In Tunis the Ninth Congress on Crime Prevention next year will also deal with this aspect.

Corruption and the economic impact of drug abuse are the two most important elements now in the *prise de conscience* on the part of everybody. A third aspect is one related to the precursor chemicals. To produce drugs, we are all aware of the fact that one needs opium poppy, or one needs a coca paste. Well, that's not enough; that's 50 per cent of the story. Then you need some chemicals, which may be difficult to control, but with new technology available, with the proper monitoring of transactions, it can be as important as the control of the raw material for putting a check on the production and abuse of drugs.

STEELE: How does one put a control on a government that's desperate for money? We look at Eastern Europe, where the new republics are in economic turmoil; the attraction is obvious. How does one put a brake, how does one put controls on board? This is an international problem, but there isn't really an international solution. It's a local solution, isn't it?

GIACOMELLI: This is not simple or easy. But, you see, the money that goes there doesn't go to help governments deal with the urgent economic problems they're facing; it goes into the pockets of the mafias, of the new fake companies and fake banks that are put up. They don't help to solve the problem. Take an example: One of the analyses we have conducted on the economic impact of the drug industry shows that, in fact, as soon as you have important traffic and money laundering, you automatically have an increase in abuse of drugs. Pakistan is an example. And this is a factor that makes the distribution of wealth much worse, because it drains money from the poor, who usually are the rank and file of drug abusers, and puts it in the pocket of a few very rich barons, who do not invest it in any productive activity, but who take it somewhere else to put it in some save haven. So it is very much like the case of the poor peasants that cultivate poppy because that provides more money, but very little money sticks to their fingers. So a proper balance, I would say, of carrot and stick, to say the law makes it an offense to cultivate drugs, but on the other hand we understand you are in need and we

will provide alternative development in the form of infrastructure, technical assistance, credit, and so on.

STEELE: But can you ever provide sufficient to counterbalance the enormous free flow of money that's out there in the drug traffic?

GIACOMELLI: It's a matter of political will. Anyway, these poor countries have been assisted for years and will be assisted. What we need is the major involvement of financial institutions. I think of the World Bank, of the regional development banks, IFAD, and the big development agencies. When we, as a programme, go into countries like Bolivia or Colombia or Burma and start the most difficult part of our activity -- which is to open a dialogue with the communities, which are very frequently marginal ethnic minorities that are isolated geographically --

STEELE: These are the producer communities we're talking about.

GIACOMELLI: Yes. Producing communities. And you talk them into experimenting. At that moment, we, who are not a development agency and have a limited budget of some $100 million, must be in a position to bring in the financial institutions, the development agencies that take over and, above all, conduct supportive activities to improve the life conditions of this population so that they can be helped to be less dependent, gradually, and not dependent. In Laos, we have a very good example of such an approach which is working very promisingly.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Giacomelli, we have only a few seconds left, but are you getting enough money to operate your Programme effectively?

GIACOMELLI: Obviously not. Nobody's getting enough money these days. And this is, in fact, one of the problems we're facing I mentioned our budget is somewhat less than $100 million, and I have a gloomy time ahead of me because money's becoming more and more difficult to get. I don't think we should ever target a big amount. We should have enough as a critical mass of credibility, and we should be able to coordinate and involve all the other players.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Giacomelli, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of World Chronicle. Our guest has been Giorgio Giacomelli, Executive Director of the UN International Drug Control Programme. He was interviewed by Ian Steel of the Press Foundation of Asia and Linda Fasulo of NBC News. I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of World Chronicle.

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